

St. Seraphim Russian Orthodox
Churches, Old Church
Lower Kalskag
Alaska ~~Bethel~~

HABS No. AK-92-A

HABS
AK,
3-LOKAL,
1A-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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AK
3-LOCAL
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ST. SERAPHIM RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCHES, OLD CHURCH

HABS No. AK-92-A

Location: Lower Kalskag, on the Kuskokwim River, Alaska.

Present Owner: Alaska Diocese, Orthodox Church in America.

Present Occupant/
Use: Vacant.

Significance: A number of historic Russian Orthodox churches survive in Alaska, built by Native congregations in traditional forms. Built of logs, the old St. Seraphim church has a form that is easy to read: nave, sanctuary, and vestibule, each covered with a gable roof of a different height.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1936.
2. Original plans and construction: The log church has three gable-roofed sections, and was undoubtedly conceived as a whole.
3. Alterations and additions: An openwork belfry, attached to the front of the vestibule, no longer stands.

B. Previous Churches on the Site:

The first church, built in about 1920, resembled this church, and was also of log construction. Located south of the present church, its site is marked by a shrine.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The square nave is covered with a gable roof, giving it a more linear appearance. The nave and vestibule have separate gable roofs.
2. Condition of fabric: Deteriorating.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The nave is roughly square, 19'-6" x 19'-9", with a 17'-4" x 14'-3" vestibule and a 15'-8" x 11'-3" sanctuary.

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2. Foundations: Wood post.
3. Walls: Hewn logs, dovetailed at the corners and chinked with moss. The logs are pegged vertically near the openings.
4. Structural system: log.
5. Stoops: There is a plank stoop on the front and side of the vestibule.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: There is a double door in the front, and a single door on the side, of the vestibule.
 - b. Windows: The windows have six-light, fixed sash, set in plain surrounds. The window on the north side of the nave was a double window, but half has been filled in.
7. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The gable roof was covered with planks, and has been recently covered with corrugated metal.
 - b. Cupolas: There were three canvas-covered onion domes. The one over the belfry no longer stands. The openwork belltower, attached to the front of the vestibule but supported on the ground, has been disassembled.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The nave was one open space, interrupted only by two columns near the center. The sanctuary on the east was separated from the nave by the iconostas.
2. Stairways: There was a one-step amvon with a semi-circular center projection and krilos at the sides.
3. Flooring: Linoleum on planks.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The plywood walls and ceilings have been removed, exposing the hewn logs. The ceiling was in a tray form.
5. Doorways: There are double doors between the nave and vestibule.

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6. Decorative features: All of the icons have been removed from the iconostas, which had round-arched doorways. Canvas was stretched on a frame to make the walls of the iconostas.

D. Site:

The church faces west, with the altar on the east, as is traditional among Russian Orthodox churches. The church is located about 25 yards from the banks of the Kuskokwim, set in a fenced graveyard. Some of the graves have been washed away by the river.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Evan, Iftukim, interviewed by author, May 24, 1990.

Wallace, Fern A. Flame of the Candle. Chilliwack, B.C.: SS. Kyril and Methody Society, 1974. Plate 90 shows this church with its belltower intact.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation of St. Seraphim Russian Orthodox Church was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), a division of the National Park Service, the state of Alaska, and the Icon Preservation Task Force. The project was executed under the general direction of Robert J. Kapsch, chief of HABS/HAER, and Boyd Evison, Alaska Regional Director, National Park Service. Recording was carried out during summer 1990 by Steven M. Peterson, project director; Jet Lowe, photographer; and Alison K. Hoagland, historian, who prepared this report.